

US Panel Says Nigeria Among Worst Violators of Religious Freedom

WASHINGTON, D.C. (May 4, 2009) - International Christian Concern (ICC) has learned that the annual report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom designated Nigeria as a country of particular concern for "tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion."

Nigeria has been plagued by religious violence since 1999 when Sharia law was introduced in the northern part of the country. Since then, the Christian minority in northern Nigeria has been more severely persecuted by Islamic extremists. Muslim radicals have been killing Christians, burning down churches, and forcing Christians to flee their homes.

Authorities in Nigeria have failed to stem this recurring violence. The report by the Commission expressed concern that "years of inaction by Nigeria's federal, state and local governments has created a climate of impunity, resulting in thousands of deaths."

The report indicates the role of countries such as Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan in fueling the violence by building mosques and Islamic religious schools in which an extreme version of Islam is preached. The report noted, "An increasing number of Nigerian Islamic scholars and clerics are being trained in Saudi Arabia and return with a politico-religious ideology that explicitly promotes hatred of, and violence against, non-Muslims."

The Commission's conclusion is: "put simply, the Nigerian Government has permitted religious violence and other severe violations of the freedom of religion to occur with impunity."

International Christian Concern has been calling for end to the impunity that radical Muslims possess in Nigeria. In our latest press release on Nigeria, ICC called for the establishment of an independent commission to investigate a recent attack in the northern state of Bauchi.

We reiterate our call for the formation of an independent investigative body to examine the root causes of the violence in northern Nigerian, bring the perpetrators of religious attacks to justice, and create a national dialogue for reconciliation and peaceful existence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

ICC's Regional Manager for Africa and the Middle East, Jonathan Racho, said, "It behooves Nigeria to act aggressively to protect Christian minorities in the northern part of the country. It is high time for Nigeria to bring the perpetrators of religious violence to justice. The lack of political will to proactively protect Christians from persecution and prosecute the perpetrators of attacks against them could result in large scale violence and create a national security crisis."